

806
United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
BANKING
DEMOCRATIC POLICY & COMMUNICATIONS
FINANCE
JUDICIARY
RULES

September 26, 2016

Received & Inspected
OCT 03 2016
FCC Mail Room

The Honorable Thomas Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

I understand that the Commission has been reviewing improvements to the Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) system (Proceeding 15-91). I am writing today to urge the Commission to consider changes that will modernize the existing system to better reflect the capacity of technology to respond to twenty-first century emergencies.

As you may know, the New York City Department of Emergency Management (NYCEM) has been providing emergency public notifications since 2007. In the face of emerging threats, New York City remains on the cutting edge of using public information systems to advance its emergency services and capabilities in executing high-level safety decisions. In fact, they were the first local or state alerting authority in the country to issue a WEA message ordering the mandatory evacuation of coastal New York communities during Hurricane Sandy. Though this resource has provided great assistance in emergency and terror situations in New York and across the country, much work remains to be done in order to modernize the system and bring it into the twenty-first century.

We saw this issue arise recently, when NYC issued a Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) regarding Ahmad Khan Rahami, the suspect in the bombings that occurred in New York and New Jersey on September 17th and September 18th. The WEA alert sent by the New York City Police Department (NYPD) detailed information about the suspect, but lacked critical details, such as a photograph, that could help citizens identify him. Because of the WEA system's outdated infrastructure, the NYPD was limited to 90 characters and could not include identifying photos or videos, or links to more information. Due to the restrictions, cell phone users were forced to search the internet or news for an image of the suspect.

It is clear the WEA system provides immeasurable support to emergency management and law enforcement agencies across the nation. That said, significant improvements must be made in order to allow agencies, such as the NYPD, to fully capitalize on the system. Accordingly, I applaud your efforts to improve the system and I ask you to expedite enhancements, such as extending the character limit to the maximum, allowing the use of multimedia images, and improving locational accuracy, so that citizens can be as informed as possible during times of risk.



I am pleased to provide these comments on the proposed rule and look forward to working with the Commission on initiatives that could strengthen this vital resource. Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Charles E. Schumer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Charles" and last name "Schumer" clearly distinguishable.

Charles E. Schumer



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

November 17, 2016

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Schumer:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's efforts to improve the Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) system.

At the September Open Meeting, the Commission adopted new rules that will improve WEA message content, delivery, and create a framework that will allow emergency managers to test, exercise, and raise public awareness about WEA. As your letter observes, the New York City Department of Emergency Management's use of WEA in connection with the Chelsea bombing highlighted WEA's current value, as well as opportunities for improvement. Under the new rules, emergency managers will be able to initiate alerts as long as 360 characters on 4G and future networks, and all alerts will soon be able to include embedded links, so that you will be able to click to see a photo of a missing child, a suspected terrorist, a map, or to call authorities. Pursuant to these new rules, alerts and warnings will also be more accurately geo-targeted to the areas where they are relevant and will be delivered immediately to consumers using 4G devices even when they are engaged in an active data session. This will allow emergency managers to send more informative messages to those individuals directly affected.

I am proud of what we have accomplished to improve WEA, but I recognize there is more work to be done. As you correctly point out, much work remains to modernize the system. The Commission continues its work to strengthen WEA, and, as an example, has an open proceeding to determine how to include thumbnail-sized photos and symbols in WEA.

I appreciate your leadership on the issue, and I am particularly pleased that we were able to answer your call to expedite enhancements to the WEA system. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Tom Wheeler